



Overview

Points To Remember About Giant Cell Arteritis

- Giant cell arteritis causes the arteries of the scalp and neck to become red, hot, swollen, or painful. The arteries of the temples are most commonly affected.
- The disorder mainly affects people over 50, especially women.
- Giant cell arteritis is treated with medications, such as prednisone.
- Early treatment will help prevent serious problems such as permanent vision loss and stroke.
- If you have giant cell arteritis, your doctor should also look for signs of another disorder, polymyalgia rheumatica.

Giant cell arteritis is a type of disorder that is marked by blood vessel inflammation.

People with often have [polymyalgia rheumatica](#), a disorder associated with pain and stiffness in the neck, shoulder, and hip.

What happens in giant cell arteritis?

Giant cell arteritis causes narrowed arteries, which reduces blood flow. The disorder mostly affects arteries located on each side of the head, although other blood vessels can also become inflamed.

Giant cell arteritis can cause potentially serious problems if untreated, including permanent vision loss and stroke. It is critical to report any symptoms to your doctor and to receive early treatment to prevent permanent tissue damage.

Who Gets

Women are more likely than men to develop giant cell arteritis, but men with the disorder are more likely to suffer eye damage that could result in blindness. Giant cell arteritis mostly affects people over the age of 50, with highest rates at 70 to 80 years of age.

Symptoms

Signs of giant cell arteritis can include:

- Flu-like symptoms early in the disease, such as tiredness, appetite loss, and fever.
- Headaches.
- Pain and tenderness over the temples.
- Double vision or vision loss.
- Dizziness.
- Problems with coordination and balance.
- Pain in the jaw and tongue, especially when eating.
- Difficulty in opening the mouth wide.
- Scalp sores (rare cases).

Diagnosis

To diagnose you with giant cell arteritis, your doctor will:

- Ask you about your medical history.
- Give you a physical exam to determine if the arteries in your temples are inflamed, tender to the touch, and have a reduced pulse.
- Take a small section of the artery in your temple to examine it under a microscope.

Treatment

Symptoms of giant cell arteritis quickly disappear when treated with corticosteroid medications, such as prednisone. The duration of drug treatment differs for each person. Your doctor will typically keep you on high doses of corticosteroids for about one month. Symptoms may develop when the corticosteroid dose is reduced to lower levels. After a while, symptoms usually clear up completely, and the doctor can stop the medication altogether.

It is critical to report any symptoms to your doctor and to receive early treatment in order to prevent serious problems, including permanent vision loss and stroke.

Research Progress

Research on giant cell arteritis includes:

- Researchers studying possible causes of giant cell arteritis are investigating the roles of genetics and environment, as well as immune system problems.
- By examining people with and without the condition, doctors are starting to understand factors associated with disease symptoms and outcomes. For example, women are more likely than men to have jaw involvement from giant cell arteritis, while men are more likely to have eye involvement that can lead to blindness.
- Researchers are also following patients over time through the Vasculitis Clinical Research Consortium. Data from these studies will be used to examine the genetics and causes of giant cell arteritis, find new ways to track disease and predict responses, understand how to treat patients, and much more.

Related Resources

U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Toll free: 888-INFO-FDA (888-463-6332)

Website: <https://www.fda.gov>

Drugs@FDA at <https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/daf>. Drugs@FDA is a searchable catalog of FDA-approved drug products.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics

Website: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs>

National Eye Institute

Website: <https://www.nei.nih.gov>

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

Website: <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov>

American College of Rheumatology

Website: <https://www.rheumatology.org>

American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association, Inc.

Website: <https://www.aarda.org>

Arthritis Foundation

Website: <https://www.arthritis.org>

National Organization for Rare Disorders

Website: <https://www.rarediseases.org>

If you need more information about available resources in your language or other languages, please visit our webpages below or contact the NIAMS Information Clearinghouse at NIAMSInfo@mail.nih.gov.

- [Asian Language Health Information](#)
- [Spanish Language Health Information](#)

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[Polimialgia reumática y la arteritis de células gigantes: Esenciales: hojas inf...](#)
[¿Qué son la polimialgia reumática y la arteritis de células gigantes?\(Esencial...](#)
[Healthy Joints Matter: Kids' Fact Sheet](#)

View/Download/Order Publications

[Polymyalgia Rheumatica and Giant Cell Arteritis, Easy-to-Read Fast Facts](#)
[Polymyalgia Rheumatica and Giant Cell Arteritis, Questions and Answers about](#)
[Arthritis, Living With: Health Information Basics for You and Your Family](#)